

The Political Economy of Land Governance in Africa

Short Course

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Women's Land Rights in Africa

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This session began by investigating the concept of gender itself - what it means, why it is important, and key concepts. Gender Relations are the relations between women and men in society, which do not occur in

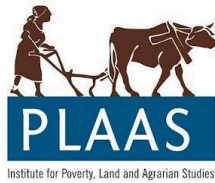
isolation from other social relations (race, class, ethnicity, etc.) and markers of identity. Social relations refer to structured and systematic interactions of different social groups and individuals within those groups for production, distribution, exchange, consumption, and reproduction. These are governed by institutions such as markets, states, civil society, and households.

The gender division of labour is an important concept for operationalizing gender relations in research. It concerns how labour is divided between men and women, the differential value given by society to tasks performed by men and women, and how these are seen as natural and functional. If we understand the gendered division of labour it helps

us position and contextualize the role of women. The differences in the division of labour are bound by differential access to and control over resources. **This division of labour is not accidental, it is historical.**

Gendered division of labour begins at the onset of capitalism and primitive accumulation. Women remain in the household while men go work in industries - it is a **systematic process**. When we think about divisions of labour, we need to emphasize the resources needed for these different labours. The first broad division is between production and reproduction. Production refers to work that produces commodities (e.g., food and services meant for the market). Reproduction refers to all activities that ensure the care and survival of a household and, therefore, a society's human resources. Broadly, production is concerned with the reproduction of commodities, while reproduction is concerned with the reproduction of life. **Feminists have conceptualized this as social reproduction.**

What happens to the worker before 8am (when they arrive at work) and after 5pm (when they leave work)? Feminist scholars emphasize the need to understand intra-household dynamics - where life needs to happen. In all societies, women carry the primary burden of unpaid and undervalued reproductive work. Social Reproduction is the labour and set of social processes and relationships that support production and maintenance of individuals, households, and communities" (Fernandez, 2017:4). It includes "the biological reproduction, everyday survival, accumulation of education and skills to participate in the capitalist economy and skills to ensure the survival of households" (Ossome and Naidu, 2016:51). It is an integral part of a capitalist system because it reproduces the labour power. **Social reproduction is not necessarily a function of capital because it happens whether people are employed or not.** It is in the interest of people to achieve it, no matter the circumstances.



There are three institutions which facilitate social reproduction: the **state**, the **market**, and the **household**. In the Global South, where many countries are still agrarian in nature, the household is at the center of where production and reproduction occur. Due to contemporary financialised capitalism, there is a crisis of social reproduction as people are struggling to live.

We then need to ask: how are people surviving where there are such high rates of unemployment and dispossession, when state intervention is inadequate and the market exacerbates inequalities? These people are often referred to as a relative surplus population. The household ends up absorbing the failures of the market and the state. It is therefore primarily **women's labour in the household that holds the failures of capitalism** (not exclusively, but primarily women). Land and natural resources become crucial resources for people's survival. Stha proceeded to provide insights from her experiences in 'the field', demonstrating the severity of the crisis of social reproduction for livelihoods and life itself.

How can we secure women's rights and access to land? Women's land rights are dependent on the land reform processes of respective countries and regions. The process of land reform is very emotive, and as a result is highly political and contested. In the African context the way we talk about land is very narrow and doesn't address how resources have actually been managed, accessed, used, and controlled. Discussions are usually around issues of 'rights' - a legal concept that does not account for the multiple meanings of land. For many Africans, particularly in rural areas, what really matters is to use, control, and even sell land in their own localities.

The laws and policies that we implement in Africa aren't only for local interests, but are often

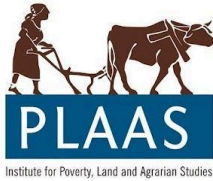
influenced by international institutions and bodies. Domestic elites tend to favour this influence as they benefit. Women, youth, and pastoralists, are often the 'losing group' in agrarian changes, facing tenure insecurity with wide-spread negative consequences for people's lives, livelihoods, and the environment.

Land titling, though popular globally, isn't a fix for all land-based issues. In Kenya and Tanzania, the commodification of land often results in landlessness. Titles make it easier to sell land or use it as collateral, leading to defaults and loss of land without adequate safeguards. In contrast, countries like India have implemented safeguards to mitigate these risks. Land formalization frequently results in land accumulation by elites, often disadvantaging women. Additionally, the concept of land titles and rights is rooted in Western legal traditions, requiring significant transformation and safeguards to be effective in different contexts. Dr Sulle presented key tools and instruments to address issues of women's land rights and quantify and monitor the performance of different countries. This revealed that overall in Africa, the implementation and protection of women's land rights are weak.

"We must be optimistic that we can be the seeds of change and transformation. We can implement reforms that are people-led and emphasize local agency".

Discussion & Spotlight

- *Can securing women's access to land and natural resources address the crisis of social reproduction? Please Support your answer.*
- *After this session, what is your take on individual land titling as the solution for women's land rights? Please elaborate*
- *As a practitioner in the land sector, what transformative actions would you take to bring about equal land access for both men and women?*



Hazel Tariro Chimbiro (Zimbabwe): Women's access to land and natural resources can address the crisis of social reproduction. When women have access to land, they have independence, a source of livelihoods, and food security. Advocacy, education, and the role of civil society is critical in ensuring equal access to land between women and men.

Bedu Mambo (Botswana): Social reproduction plays a crucial role in women's access to land. If women have access to land they will be about to contribute to society and their contribution will not go unnoticed, as is the case in most countries currently.

Ahmed Abdillahi Abdi (Somalia): It is important for women to have access to resources and land tenure to combat the social reproduction crisis and allow for food security, diversity of livelihoods, enhanced household nutrition, and generally improved health.

Mogae Makonyela (Botswana): Individual land titling is not a solution because it can lead to landlessness and can also be problematic and doesn't solve the problem of women's land rights. It can also lead to the exclusion of marginalised groups, especially in capitalist societies where the wealthy are privileged.

Quotable from Zoom Chat:

Carolyne Tumuhimbise (Uganda): Very good insights here. Now thinking broadly at the household is a good way to analyze the access to land and their livelihood. Back to the customs where the male child will get access to Land or a piece of land. I hope this advocacy will help the girl child also get a user right or a portion of land so that we start from the customs.

Samekelisiwe Nqayi (South Africa): Stha Yeni I love your articulation, it has broadened down to a cycle of social reproduction and production in our societies, it highlights the concept of time poverty and the housewifization as Nancy Fraser unpacks. I am deeply touched.....

Rethinking the Conservation of Natural Resource Management & Land Governance in Africa from a Political Ecological Lens

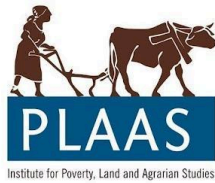
[Prof Moenieba Isaacs](#)

University of the Western Cape - Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)



The main argument of their presentation is to expose the problematic of mainstream conservation, and showcase the ways that it undermines and subjugates people/communities who depend on nature for survival. How do we think about conservation, natural resource management, and land governance in Africa through a political ecological lens?

The philosophy of **conservation** is about the wilderness and preventing the extinction of species. This has been the reason for protection areas with the aim of protecting nature from human interference. In this philosophy, nature and humanity are distinct from one another. Local populations are seen as the problem and violence is often deployed to 'protect the environment'. Conservation has always been characterised by violence, separating people from their livelihoods and criminalising their livelihoods. The concept of conservation stated in the West, to protect 'unspoiled lands'. The concept of



conservation is deeply rooted in colonialism. The wilderness is a social construct designed by humans at a very particular moment in history. 'Wilderness landscapes' sanction and prohibit the presence of particular social groups. **The meaning of wilderness shifts historically with different social processes attached to it.**

Mainstream conservation historically was about protecting nature from industrial development, and capitalism. However, in recent years, **conservation is more accommodating to the needs of capitalism than it ever was.** (Land grab for conservation, and Accumulation by Conservation). The expanding number of protected areas alongside the increase in revenue they generate through tourism has in some contexts resulted in **intensification of security measures of protected areas including the use of the army and private security**, especially against wildlife poaching in national parks. The local people living near protected areas viewed the urban elite driven conservation approaches as a threat to their livelihoods which depended on access to surrounding natural resources. Conservationists on the other hand viewed locals as culturally backward and as destroyers of nature. The capitalist machine is all about how money and natural resources are working together in terms of driving accumulation.

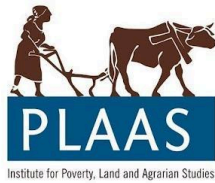
In colonial Africa, governments explicitly conceived PAs to protect threatened nature against humans. Science allowed nature to be classified, counted, and (at least in theory) to be controlled by government bureaucracies set up to optimize relations between state, society and nature. Maps played a key role in distributing space, nature and people.

Political ecology is an analytical framework that examines the intersection and relationship between the environment, politics, economics, power, and culture. It bridges the gap between human ecology, which does not account for politics and economics,

and political economy that lacks analysis of the environment. Questions about protecting the environment are deeply political. "Political ecology examines environment-society relations and struggles over access to natural resources" (Sultana, 2021, 156).

Key features of political ecology are that it is critical, and highlights the struggle, conflict, and messiness of actual power relations without jumping to conclusions. It is also holistic, taking into account the whole rather than parts of the mere sum of parts. It is also historical, meaning a dynamic analysis that prioritises context. It also employs multiple scales of analysis (local, regional, global), bringing the local to the global and understanding how these influence each other. Political ecology focuses on various forms of power and questions normalised claims and values about the environment that are often taken for granted.

Unlike mainstream approaches, political ecology recognises nature as inherently political, influenced by different actors with varying resources and networks. Political ecology views science as a domain of power, questioning who defines human-nature relations. Mainstream approaches tend to present themselves as objective and neutral, focusing on population growth as a main cause of environmental change and tends to blame environmental degradation on poor people. **These mainstream approaches are deeply racist.** Political ecology is a framework/lens that allows us to analyse particular forms of injustices related to the management of the environment. Political Ecology of Conservation (land) examines the intersection and relationship between biodiversity conservation, politics, economics, power, gender and culture, and is concerned with the use, access, control, distribution, and biodiversity of natural resources. Land is an entry point to livelihoods in forests, fisheries, and food.



The Global Biodiversity Framework, which we signed at the UN Biodiversity Conference in 2022 ordering a target '30x30' aiming to effectively conserve at least 30% of the world's lands, freshwater and oceans by 2030. The majority of intended conservation land is on the African continent, and threatens to push people off their land in the name of conservation. This is an internationally funded land grab. Prof Isaacs emphasises that we do not need to look abroad, **Africa has the answers**. The social justice struggle for land should also be a social justice struggle to join when it comes to nature and conservation. "We don't need fences, we only need the eyes of the community to protect nature".

Discussion & Spotlight

- Watch "[Chinko](#)" and critically reflect on the approach and if a political ecological approach has been used to conserve nature for the future in Africa?

Florence Ofori Aburam (Ghana): Instead of only thinking about who is benefiting, we also need to emphasise how/in what ways they are benefiting. We need to move away from mainstream discourses and challenge their assumptions.

John Magombo (Malawi): The video only addresses immediate solutions but does not address long-term transformational changes. This shows how conservation is a colonial tool to grab land from people. It also falls short in not incorporating local knowledge on how to preserve what is already there.

Abdihakim Osman Ali (Somalia): We need African solutions to African problems.

Quotable from Zoom Chat:

Mariam Diakite (Mali): The session on political ecology was an eye opener for me. The video on land

conservation was thought provoking and I find the narrative around land conservation quite disturbing after learning about the hidden agendas and negative impact it's having on African people. This issue should not be taken lightly as it is / has / and will continue to harm many people.

Owen Dhlwayo (Zimbabwe): Different actors viewing nature differently, if not managed well can result in conflict and subsequently to domination of one actor by the other actor

Rural & Urban Land Administration in Africa

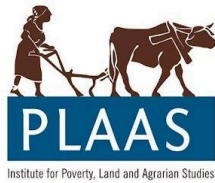
[Prof Andries du Toit](#)

University of the Western Cape -
School of Government



This session focuses on what colonialism has meant for spatial fragmentation and the governance of land. Prof du Toit began by emphasising that you cannot understand the problems of land administration without understanding the problems of state administration and state formation in Africa. The technical definition of land administration is the way in which the rules of land tenure are made operational. It is a set of practices, institutions, and arrangements that underpin the way we use and hold land. Land administration comprises land tenure, value, use, and development, imposed on an underlying cadastre that collectively form a state's land policy. A large part of land administration is resolving disputes.

Land governance is a technical exercise that is not divorced from politics, when you are administering land you are governing people. The technical is political and the political is also technical. When



talking about land you are talking about soil and territory (a physical terrain on which peoples lives unfold). To understand the evolution of land administration in Africa we need to understand the intersections of; land administration; the transformation of economies; the management of populations; and the formation of states.

The history of Europe has greatly impacted what has happened on the African continent. The key drivers of change were not capitalism itself but the Catholic Church and the development of modern centralized states. These factors led to the rise of individual land rights, which subsequently facilitated the emergence of capitalism. Colonialism has left a patch-work of land administration systems in Africa, with the challenge of attempting to harmonise the resistance of multiple land administrations. Colonial powers relied on the organisation and management of space to facilitate the control of populations. Different types of colonialism resulted in the emergence of different land management systems

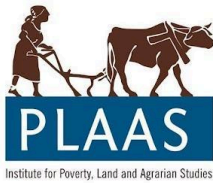
The rise of modern states led to the emergence of a new kind of political power, where power became less personal and more evenly exercised across the entire territory. This power was much stricter and more enforced than before, shifting from being centralized in a person to being decentralized to a societal government that exercised power across the area within borders. To work, this system relied on complicated administrative mechanisms, in order to be legible to the state so it could extend its power over all its territory and see the population it governed. Land management had to be centralized to maintain an accurate archive, enabled by technological advances, particularly in spatial data, leading to what we now know as the cadastre. European cadastres were parcel-based, with clearly defined, geographically and mathematically accurate boundaries, unlike previous flexible boundaries. A

cadastre not only records what is there but also imposes clarity on previously vague boundaries.

In contrast to metropolitan government, colonial power was uneven, heavily relying on territorial segmentation. This often involved the actual segregation of populations. Colonial government was characterized by the demarcation of distinct zones of authority and the territorialization of space. As articulated by Mahmood Mamdani, Colonialism created a legacy of a bifurcated form of state power that mediated racial domination through tribally organized local authorities. There were two kinds of governments imposed, premised on racial identity in citizens and ethnic identity in subjects. This system maintained control and exploitation while preserving traditional power structures, resulting in a form of despotism that was decentralized yet still oppressive. Colonial powers did not leave customary land rights alone, but rather attempted to recognise and formalise them in a way that Western powers could understand. Prof du Toit applied these ideas to the history of South Africa, demonstrating how Apartheid spatial planning weaponised the distinction between rural and urban spaces and turned it into a central principle of government, one that persists today.

What is to be done? A homogenisation of land rights through the extension of European land administration through space? A continued segregation whereby we must accept the reality of legal pluralism? Or a harmonisation, attempting to find ways of articulating and connecting these different systems? The solution requires complicated analysis, negotiation, and trade-offs, particularly around ambiguities as a consequence of native reserves and conflicts about the meaning and value of land titling.

On the one hand, Africa's extreme diversity leads to many cross-cutting similarities in experiences, but



regional differences cannot be ignored, and no single solution will work everywhere. The emergence of digital technology and GIS holds significant potential for creating transparent systems for recording land rights, allowing centralized visibility of land holdings. Effective governance requires maps, surveys, sensors, and a cadastre. However, there are two important problems: Western systems of land governance often conflict with local notions of family or community tenure, potentially weakening women's land rights and allowing patriarchal ideologies to dominate. Thus, there is a need for flexible land tenure systems that accommodate local needs. Moreover, the effectiveness of such systems depends on the government overseeing them, creating a tension between the desire to centralize and the need for locally responsive systems, calling for a balance between centralization and decentralization. There is no one right answer, every resolution will always be a political resolution, and **we need to think carefully and critically about our proposals and interventions.**

Discussion & Spotlight

- *How is land management in our area of work affected by the compartmentalization and fragmentation of administrative and political space.*
- *To what degree is there unevenness and differentiation in the recordal, mapping, management and adjudication of different kinds of rights in land?*
- *What are the implications – both the possible benefits and the risks - of the 'legibilisation' and recordal of off-register land rights?*

Godiramang Motlhagodi (Botswana): The phenomenon of different land administration can lead to differences in terms of access to necessary services in both urban and rural areas, often at the disadvantage to those living on farms who do not

have access to these services. If we prioritise individual rights, it could lead to the neglect of communal land and resources as people are only focused on their own space.

Mercy Masanga (Tanzania): The effects of spatial compartmentalisation are definitely felt on the ground. Tools like GIS can be used to keep record of land tenure to make sure everything is preserved well and that the system is more sustainable and reliable.

Delphine Ekpang (Nigeria): There really needs to be a consolidation between rural and urban lands.

Diom Jasper Yam (Cameroon): GIS is useful as you can digitise land rights and allow for a centralised system.

Quotable from Zoom Chat:

Abdihakim Osman Ali (Somalia): Colonists tend to segregate land to clans and that norm has been inherited from generations to another. This can be linked to the present day contested customary land tenure system.

Eunah Siapenga (Zambia): In Zambia we had crown lands which are now state lands and this is where the colonists had settled. This is seen in the levels of developments in these areas as compared to the native lands. The segmentation is very distinct even now as development has concentrated in the urban areas leaving out the rural areas. sad state of affairs

Please note that this newsletter is not an official or approved record of the lectures or discussion in the course. It is compiled by the PLAAS team.